

Fan-demonium as Liu lights up qualifying

HURDLING GREAT DOESN'T DISAPPOINT AS HE SETS FASTEST TIME IN ADVANCING TO SECOND ROUND

By LEI LEI
CHINA DAILY

GUANGZHOU — Star hurdler Liu Xiang's first appearance at the Guangzhou Asian Games thrilled a huge crowd at Aoti Stadium on Monday night.

In the opening round of the men's 110m event, Liu clocked 13.48 seconds to easily top his heat and advance to the next round in his quest for a third successive Asian Games championship.

"I felt very relaxed today and it is only the first round," Liu said after the race.

"Today is a preparation for the final. I will fight on in the final."

Thunderous applause greeted China's track-and-field superstar when he walked into the stadium. During his introduction, Liu waved to the audience confidently — drawing even louder cheers.

"The spectators are very enthusiastic. I think this is a lucky place for me," said Liu.

"I took part in my first National Games here when I was 18 years old. At the Asian Championships here last year, I also won the gold. I will try to strive for a good result this time as well."

Before the race, Liu's coach Sun Haiping expressed concerns about the cool evening tempera-



EDMOND TANG / CHINA DAILY

Liu Xiang of China pulls a face for the TV camera after winning his heat in the 110m hurdles on Monday. Liu led all qualifiers with 13.48 seconds.

ture, but Liu said it was all right for him.

"I used to run in even lower temperatures, so today is fine," he said. "Everything was good for me today. I will try my best in the final. I hope I can finish within 13.20 seconds."

Since his arrival in Guangzhou, Liu has been training in isolation.

He quietly moved into the Athletes' Village on Saturday evening and remained in his room for most of the time.

All requests from volunteers for photos and autographs have been turned down.

"I had to refuse them all, since more than 100 volunteers showed up within minutes," said

Yang Peigang, an official from the Shanghai sports bureau in Liu's hometown.

Liu's appearance at the stadium prompted a standby alert to all staff for an expected overflow of spectators and media.

Liu's teammate, Shi Dongpeng, who beat him at the Diamond League meet in Shanghai on May

23, also qualified for the final, in 13.89 seconds.

Shi was not satisfied with that result and aims to be faster in Wednesday's final.

"My body was so tight today that I could not get a good result," said Shi. "I will do my best in the final and I hope I can achieve my best result."

Huang bounces past He as lucky charm has little effect

By CUI JIA
CHINA DAILY

GUANGZHOU — Even a lucky charm from her gold-medal-winning boyfriend couldn't catapult He Wenna, China's leading female trampolinist, to the top of the podium on Monday.

An injured He finished half a point behind compatriot Huang Shanshan, who scored a personal best of 41.4, to clinch the battle, despite He's boyfriend, Chen Yibing, cheering on from the stands after painting her name across his fingernails.

Chen, China's top gymnast, was hoping some of his good fortune — he picked up two titles in Guangzhou — would rub off on

the woman he fell in love with after they both won gold medals at the Beijing Olympics two years ago.

He, 21, the pre-tournament favorite, blamed her loss on an ailment.

"I actually lost to my own injury, which affected my performance," she said, adding that having Chen in the crowd was not a distraction.

"My only focus is the competition. Nothing else."

Huang, 24, delivered a flawless performance in the final to move up from second place after the preliminary round and steal the crown; the bronze went to Ekaterina Khilko of Uzbekistan with a score of 39.50.

"I was very relaxed because everybody's attention was on He,"



TRAMPOLINE

said Huang. "I didn't really have any pressure and that's why I did so well."

China's trampoline team is the dominant force in the sport, having picked up all of the major titles over the past few years.

In Guangzhou, the country also finished 1-2 in the men's individual event, with Dong Dong clinching gold.

Dong, the top qualifier, outscored teammate Tu Xiao by 0.7 points to clinch the title despite both performing routines of only moderate difficulty levels. What made the difference was Dong's execution.

"We have to admit that our team is the best in the world, and we

don't have many challengers," said Dong.

"Our biggest rivals are ourselves, and we are very difficult to defeat."

Tetsuya Sotomura of Japan won bronze with the highest difficulty score, and in doing so relegated compatriot Masaki Ito to fourth.

Others fared badly but still felt like champions, such as 23-year-old Seleh Kh S. A. A. Alkhaldeir of Kuwait, a full-time air traffic controller who finished seventh in a field of eight in his international debut.

"I am the only trampolinist in Kuwait. I've only been training for four months, while the others have been training and competing for years," he said. "I feel as good as if I'd won the gold medal."



ZOU ZHONGPING / CHINA DAILY

Gold medalist Huang Shanshan of China performs in the women's trampoline final on Monday.